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ABSTRACT

Combining freshman composition and introduction to literature courses can make students active participants in what they read. In one course, students were instructed to read a literary work for a class. When the class met, the students were to write the name of the assigned story, the author, and anything they wanted to write about the story. Students wrote freely for 10 minutes, then were to write a summation sentence and participate in a discussion of what they had written. Following the next reading assignment, students were to write about the material at home, then in class, and a third time following a class discussion. By the third writing the students began to develop a fairly sophisticated understanding of what they had read. For subsequent reading assignments, students went through the three stages on their own. The technique aided understanding of the readings; some students reported that they were even applying the methods in other classes. (An appendix contains samples of writing on Cather and Hemingway stories from student notebooks.) (SG)

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THE READER'S NOTEBOOK
A Tool for Thinking With Writing

The second semester of Freshman Composition that I teach is a combination writing course and introduction to literature course. Often students come to us as passive readers, their eyes scanning the text for something that will interest them. Their experience with literature has been one of reading cursorily through a story, coming to class, and having someone else tell them what the story says. I became tired of walking into class and asking students what they reacted to in the work and getting, "I dunno, it didn't make much sense to me," as they yawned and sprawled across a desk like the slash mark across a traffic sign forbidding me to enter. I wanted to make them active participants in the process of the story. And they could only do that if they read and thought about the story before class began. I knew from my own experience that writing about what I did not know often led me into understanding what I did not know I knew.

I wanted them to find what I had found, that if I engaged myself with the text, whatever the text was, I would find it interesting. But then, for most of us that is natural--we are in this profession because we have always found the work of words to be intriguing, interesting, and

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engaging. What I wanted was a means of letting my students discover some of what I had discovered.

When I introduce the course, I talk about the two different kinds of writing they will do; formal academic discourse, and informal writing. I suggest that the triad of content, writer, and reader based on the tradition of rhetoric is central, but that in informal, or writer-based, writing the reader is also the writer. In other words, "I write to understand what I mean."

The first class period I tell them that they will have to keep a notebook of informal responses to the literature, but that I will help them get started. Then I assign a story to be read for the next class, but they aren't supposed to write about it yet.

When they come to class, the first thing I ask them to do is open their notebook to a blank page (preferably the first one [organization must also be trained]). I tell them to write down the name of the story, the author's name, and the date. Then I tell them to start writing about the story, anything they want to, but they have to keep writing until I tell them to stop. If they can't think of anything to write about the story, they are supposed to write, "I can't think of anything to write about this story," and repeat it if necessary. I let them free-write for about ten minutes. When they have stopped writing, I ask them to read through what they have written and then write a summation sentence that contains the most interesting or predominant

or intriguing idea, or the direction in which they think they are going.

Then we talk about two things. The first is what they wrote about the story. I let them all share if there is time. I say nothing about the story, only let them share their responses. Because the freewriting exercise has forced them to write about the story, they have a very good, non-directed, discussion of the story. I say "they' because I have not given any of my views on the story. They will have brought up all the major ideas of the story and focused on the important questions of the story. After about ten or fifteen minutes of sharing their ideas, I shift the discussion. I ask them to comment on what they noticed as they wrote. Then I get responses like, "I didn't think there was anything to say about this story, but once I started writing, I had something." The students have discovered the first premise of writer-based writing, "you have to write to write."

Then I assign another story for the next day, and ask them to write about it before class, just like we did in class. When they come to class, I ask them to share what they wrote about the story. They ask questions, which I don't answer, and in general begin to form some tentative ideas. Then I ask them to open their notebooks to that entry, and using the summation sentence from the first entry as a starting place, to begin writing again. After about ten minutes I stop them and ask them to summarize again.

Then I ask them to share, trying to draw on students who have not participated in the discussion yet. Then they do a third writing on the same story. At the end of the third writing, they do a final summation and we share what they have to say about the story and what the writing process revealed.

By this time they have formed some fairly sophisticated understandings, or answered some questions that opened the story for them. On their own and with help from each other, they have become active participants in the reading process. I am still a very minor participant in the discussion. I want them to see that they have the ability to see the story and to gain confidence in that ability. When we talk about the process, they quite often say that the third writing really made the story come together for them. For instance, here is a comment by a student who had just read "The Destructors" by Graham Greene and had written three looped responses: "My first reaction after reading the story was, why do we have to read such tasteless garbage. Upon reflection and writing one does understand it was not merely destruction, but a hidden why. It is definitely a story of human nature, combined with the variables of delinquency and war." On her own, this student has moved from the initial reaction many immature readers have to a good work of fiction to the much more sophisicated position which has prepared her for a discussion of the story.

When the class has talked about the story and the writing process to my satisfaction, I tell them that they have just done a series of loops on the story. I remind them that they have explored the story with very little input from me. Then I mention some of the major ideas and important concerns of the story that they have discovered and why they are important. Their next assignment is to read the next story and do a series of three loops on the story on their own.

I would like to refer you to the samples that were distributed. I have used three student samples, all from the same year and the same stories. The first is on "Paul's Case" by Willa Cather. While we may feel like we are intruding as we read this, I assure you the students have given full permission for me to use their entries. Also, I have not corrected spelling, grammar, or usage.

Student A

"Paul's Case" Willa Cather 2-7-89

I. I liked the story a lot. Paul is such a strange boy. He's very discontent with his life, and what the future holds.

School means nothing to him. He sees the teachers as very inferior to the people of the theatre. He dreams of a theatre life, such a contrast to his existence on Cordelia Street.

We don't hear much about his family. His mother is gone - dead or left, the reader doesn't know. Paul has sisters, but is not close to them. He somewhat fears his father, too, as is obvious when he comes home late and goes down the basemsnt for the night.

His father wasn't extraordinarily poor, yet he didn't like to hand out money for carfare, etc. He trusted Paul enough to have him (Paul) take the company's money to the bank. It's interesting that he trusted him like this - he knew the boy didn't go to school, he was probably aware that the boy wasn't truthful. Yet, maybe he wasn't. Maybe he was one of those parents who let their kids kind of do their own thing and never pay much attention to them.

I didn't expect Paul to kill himself. I guess I thought he'd go back to Cordelia after his "fling." Summation: Paul lived in a fantasy land.

II. But maybe Paul couldn't go back. He finally realized his dream, what he wanted happened. Cordelia was just too pitiful, too trivial. It was a waste of time for him.

He didn't seem to feel much guilt about stealing. That could have been because he wasn't going to have to live with his conscience long. When one plans on dying - does anything really matter?

The college boy was different from Paul. Their lives crossed briefly, but not meaningfully. One night they shared - as party goers; that kind of unique relationship that brings together so many, for something so worthless.

It's easy to see why Paul's teacher resented him. He showed them no respect, and just didn't care about their classes. He felt a need to make fun of them, so that his classmates would know he had no high regard for these figures of authority.
Summation: Paul saw as trivial what most of us find important.

III. Paul was like us all in the fact that we have dreams and high hopes. He strayed from the norm, though, in the manner in which he carried out his desires. He lived in a fantasy land most of the time, yet his fantasy became real. Most of the Cordelian's accepted their fate, accepted their screaming kids, food smelling clothes, and cramped living quarters. This was it. And it wasn't so bad.

Most people accept their lives. We fight things for awhile, and try to change, but in the end we accept it. We make the best of things. And we pity the Paul's. Should we?
Summation: We accept our lives as they are for the most part; we don't always understand those who want to change.

Notice how the student has moved from tentative questions about Paul's motivations to a fairly general, and somewhat sophisticated response to the story. She is ready to begin discussing the story from the position of having thought about it and come to some tentative conclusions.

In the next entry, and I will summarize here (see Appendix for complete samples), the writer starts out with the assertion, "Paul is a very sad disturbed young man." She then moves to the first summation, "Paul lives in a fantasy world in which only money can make people happy." In her second loop she comes back to the idea that "Paul is seriously disturbed." But she moves in the third entry to an insight into Paul, "Paul feels that he is destined to live the good life and he won't accept anything less." The student is now sure of her reaction and is ready to become engaged in a discussion of the text.

If you would turn now to page 4 (the back of the second page) of the handout, I would direct your attention to "Hills Like White Elephants" by Ernest Hemingway. I have always found this story fun to teach, but we could waste a lot of time trying to figure out "the operation." If we want our students to become attentive readers, then we want them to be able to discover that important detail on their own. Listen to Student A again:

> I. I find this story very confusing. I'm not sure what the "awfully simple operation" is. It could be sex. Or maybe she's pregnant.

She seems to me to not care as much about the "operation" as he does. He wants her to have it more than she does.

The white elephant thing got me too. There are elephants that are white, but a white elephant can also be something that's unwanted, like a possession, etc. What is the white elephant here? Is it the girl?

I have so many questions about the story. Why do they drink so much? Why are they in Spain? Is she an American too? They's spend nights at hotels, were they tourists?

It's like he really wants her to have the operation - but says he doesn't care. If I knew what the operation was, I'd know why it's so important to him.

Summation: He wants her to have the operation more than she wants to have it.

She then goes on to say in loop two that she thinks the girl is pregnant, but she still doesn't know what the operation is. Look now at loop three.

III. Is she very young? I think so, that would explain her seeming innocence. She wants everything to be "back to normal." What all has really changed? Has she just changed physically? How have his feelings toward her changed? He says he still loves

her; she says she doesn't care about herself. Wait! I think I've got it, she's pregnant - but will have an abortion!! It's got to be. And I've written all this garbage already. "Letting the air in" - that could be an abortion. (the way he'd describe it to her)

He said, "I don't want anybody but you." He doesn't want a baby. How could I not have seen this - it's all so simple now. I don't know if she wants the baby or not. She doesn't really seem to know. I think if he wanted it she'd keep it. I think she realizes, too, that they're not going to be together forever. And the white elephant, the not wanted, it's the baby!

Summation: If he wanted the baby I think she'd keep it. But the way things stand, I think she'll have an abortion.

Another benefit for us as we read these notebooks, is that we really see the students' begin to engage their minds with the text.

After they have used the triple-looped response for a few assignments, I introduce a third method of working with the notebook. They read and write as usual, and then we have a class discussion. The discussions very seldom get bogged down in what happens next in the story because the students have worked through most of that in their notebooks

and have started digging into serious questions they have on the stories. We all share and discuss, my taking an active or passive role as the discussion requires. Quite often I have two or three ideas I wish to present, or I may clarify and help shape their ideas into a more clear understanding of the story.

Then, with one eye on the clock, I stop class discussion with about twenty minutes remaining. I ask them to open their notebooks, date it and indicate the story, and write "After Discussion Response" at the top of the entry. Then they write for ten minutes. As before, a free-writing that will inherently focus on the discussion.

Again, we share their responses. In most cases they find that they start to make connections between their before class notebook entries and the discussion. Quite often there are disagreements from before dicussion to after discussion, and they resolve those in the notebook. Then I tell them they have another tool for extending the notebook, the after-discussion response. We talk about the new insights they have gained in the discussion and how their writing is reflecting that.

If you turn now to Student C on "Paul's Case," we can see some of that development. It is on page three (the back of the first page). In the first entry, the student says, "Paul was not normal." She follows that line of thinking pretty much throughout all three loops. Note the summations:

What was Paul's problem? His behavior was not normal. But he was intelligent.

I think Paul was frightened and a coward. Why did he commit suicide?

I think Paul was abnormal in his thinking. He had to be to take his own life.

This student is judging Paul on her notions of suicide. The class dicussion contained a lively debate about suicide which this student did not enter--she just listened.

Now turn to the last page. Both of these are from student C--she elected to do the triple loops plus the after discussion response.

Paul was not really that abnormal. He was a troubled teenager, not knowing what he wanted or what to do about it. I feel he was rebeling in his own way. He didn't have a mother and it seemed his father had no extra time for him. In today's society, Paul would have or could have gotten help. Paul did not feel accepted and he had low self-esteem. He had no where to turn, so I believe he just lived in his fantasy world, where he was safe. That is where he was comfortable. He felt accepted at the theater; he was someone important. Nobody questioned him. He had grandious ideas of himself while at the theater. I think his suicide

> was well planned. He spent a week in New York on stolen money, enjoying himself. He know it had to end, that he would get caught. So, the only way out was suicide. It seemed easy enough. This way he wouldn't be punished for stealing the money. He had it all planned out carefully. He found a way to finally be at rest.

She has changed her notion of Paul. She can now see the character and begin to judge the character on his merits, not her beliefs.

The notebooks are a valuable tool for the students to use. Some report that they are doing that kind of informal writing on their own in other classes, particularly if they are having difficulty understanding a concept or idea. When that happens I know they have discovered how to use writing for their explorations and growth. I enjoy reading the notebooks, but I tell my students that they are for the student, not for me. When I evaluate them, I try to evaluate whether they have become active readers, not whether they have used proper forms of academic discourse. For those who use the multiple entry responses, they do become active readers. The key, I think, is to show them how to use the informal writing. It takes two or three class periods of time, but in the end is well worth it.

APPENDIX

Sample Notebook entries

Student A
"Paul's Case" Willa Cather 2-7-89

I. I liked the story a lot. Paul is such a strange boy. He's very discontent with his life, and what the future holds.

School means nothing to him. He sees the teachers as very inferior to the people of the theatre. He dreams of a theatre life, such a contrast to his existence on Cordelia Street.

We don't hear much about his family. His mother is gone - dead or left, the reader doesn't know. Paul has sisters, but is not close to them. He somewhat fears his father, too, as is obvious when he comes home late and goes down the basemsnt for the night.

His father wasn't extraordinarily poor, yet he didn't like to hand out money for carfare, etc. He trusted Paul enough to have him (Paul) take the company's money to the bank. It's interesting that he trusted him like this - he knew the boy didn't go to school, he was probably aware that the boy wasn't truthful. Yet, maybe he wasn't. Maybe he was one of those parents who let their kids kind of do their own thing and never pay much attention to them.

I didn't expect Paul to kill himself. I guess I thought he'd go back to Cordelia after his "fling."
Summation: Paul lived in a fantasy land.

II. But maybe Paul couldn't go back. He finally realized his dream, what he wanted happened. Cordelia was just too pitiful, too trivial. It was a waste of time for him.

He didn't seem to feel much guilt about stealing. That could have been because he wasn't going to have to live with his conscience long. When one plans on dying - does anything really matter?

The college boy was different from Paul. Their lives crossed briefly, but not meaningfully. One night they shared - as party goers; that kind of unique relationship that brings together so many, for something so worthless.

It's easy to see why Paul's teacher resented him. He showed them no respect, and just didn't care about their classes. He felt a need to make fun of them, so that his classmates would know he had no high regard for these figures of authority.
Summation: Paul saw as trivial what most of us find important.

III. Paul was like us all in the fact that we have dreams and high hopes. He strayed from the norm, though, in the manner in which he carried out his desires. He lived in a fantasy land most of the time, yet his fantasy became real. Most of the Cordelian's accepted their fate, accepted their screaming kids, food smelling clothes, and cramped living quarters. This was it. And it wasn't so bad.

Most people accept their lives. We fight things for awhile, and try to change, but in the end we accept it. We make the best of things. And we pity the Paul's. Should we?
Summation: We accept our lives as they are for the most part; we don't alwayws understand those who want to change.

Student B
"Paul's Case" Willa Cather

Paul is a very sad disturbed young man. His only happiness lies in his escapes into a fantasy world filled with beautiful, rich people. He doesn't want to be a musician or an artist, he just wants to be near them.

He detests the life his parents live. He hates his school teachers because he feels that none of them really know what the good life is about. He feels superior to them. When he smarts off to his teachers it's his way of showing them this. If he behaves and listens to what they say, he feels like he's one of then. Above all, he does not want to be considered one of them! He looks down on them and his family and his neighbors because he thinks their lives are meaningless and hum-drum.

Paul's life is centered around his fantasy about a better life. I think that he may have been somewhat mentally disturbed. He never seems to look at things realistically. I'm sure his home wasn't really as bad as he thought. He sees money as the key to all happiness.

Summation: Paul lives in a fantasy world in which only money can make people happy.

Second Loop

When Paul misbehaves in school, it isn't because he's a mean boy. It's just his way of saying that he's not one of them. He's not interested in anything they have to say. His worst fear is being considered one of them. He thinks his life at Carnegie Hall is real and the life on Cordelia Street is a fantasy.

All through the story, Paul is struggling to be considered a "somebody." He never has the ambition to take school seriously so that he can work his way into a higher social class. He wants it to just happen. If he's around people of a higher social class, he will automatically be one of them. He spends all his time in his fantasies. He never seems to think rationally. Even when he plans his suicide, he keeps his mind busy with other things. He doesn't seriosly consider the implications of what he's doing.

Summation: Paul is seriously disturbed.

Third Loop

Paul never realizes that he's confusing reality with fantasy. His fantasies become his life. When all this is taken away from him, he sees no reason to live.

Many young people have fantasies about being rich and being "somebody," but Paul takes these fantasies one step further. They become an obsession with him. Nothing else is of any importance to him. This is clearly shown when Paul meets the college boy in New York. They both go out for the evening and enjoy the good life, but the college boy knows that he will have to return to college when the weekend is over. Paul believes that the "good life" is what he was destined to live. If he can't have it, he doesn't want to live at all.

Summation: Paul feels that he is destined to live the good life and he won't accept anything less.

Student C
"Paul's Case" by Willa Cather February 7, 1989

This was a rather strange story, sad and depressing also. Paul was not normal, that was obvious from the beginning of the story. He wasn't retarded, just abnormal. In fact, I think he was very intelligent. He had an interest in the theater and the arts, and all the finer things in life. But, why did Paul lie and fanticize, instead of trying to better himself. If he would have settled down in school, he could have found a good job later in life. But he seemed to want it all now, the good life. Why did he hate his father so much? Did his father represent the life he hated? Or did he hate his father for other reasons. After all the trouble Paul had gotten into his father was always there to bail him out? Why? You would think his father would have eventually given up on him. Did Paul's father realize he wasn't normal? If so, why didn't he get help for him rather than defend him? I guess the story left me with a lot of questions. How old was Paul? What was the rest of his family like? Paul almost seemed like he had a split personality. He was completely different when he was among people at the theater or in places of luxury. There he was sauve and sophisticated, not full of hate.
Summation: What was Paul's problem? His behavior was not normal. But he was intelligent.

Second Loop

Paul needed help, but nobody seemed to notice or care to notice. Was he dangerous? Maybe not. He seemed to be happy living in his fantasy world. But he became so agitated when he had to return to his normal life. Why didn't he leave his routine life and go for the finer things in life? He didn't seem to be lazy, as long as enjoyed what he was doing. He could have gotten a job and supported himself. Maybe this was too frightening for Paul. He was secure under his father's roof, even though he hated it. After he stole the money and escaped to New York, he knew what he did was wrong. But, he layed that all aside and enjoyed another whole week in his fantasy world. He had to know it would have to end. He know his father would find out. It didn't seem to bother him. He did commit suicide. I think, he thought this was his only way out this time. I don't believe he thought things through very well. I would have thought Paul was too much of a coward to take his own life. Did he just snap? To end his life in such a manner wasn't normal.
Summation: I think Paul was frightened and a coward. Why did he commit suicide?

Third Loop

Maybe Paul wasn't all that abnormal as I thought. Was he just frightened by life and didn't know how to cope with it? He seemed rather artistic and enjoyed fine music. He didn't have anyone that he could talk to, that really understood him. Only the people in his fantasy world understood him. He got along well with these people. They liked him. They made Paul feel as if he belonged. Was he too intelligent for his own good? He was a master at getting into trouble. He obviously thought suicide was the right answer. How sad. His only way to survive was to die. But he had a good time the last week of his life. He had all the fine things he had always dreamed about. Now, he had acutually lived that. Maybe at this point, Paul didn't care anymore. Did he find out that his fantasy life was actually no better then his regular life was? Was it just his imagination? I believe he didn't really know what he was doing, as far as his own suicide.

Summation: I think Paul was abnormal in his thinking. He had to be, to take his own life.

Student A
"Hills Like White Elephants" Ernest Hemingway 2-9-89

I. I find this story very confusing. I'm not sure what the "awfully simple operation" is. It could be sex. Or maybe she's pregnant.

She seems to me to not care as much about the "operation" as he does. He wants her to have it more than she does.

The white elephant thing got me too. There are elephants that are white, but a white elephant can also be something that's unwanted, like a possession, etc. What is the white elephant here? Is it the girl?

I have so many questions about the story. Why do they drink so much? Why are they in Spain? Is she an American too? They's spend nights at hotels, were they tourists?

It's like he really wants her to have the operation - but says he doesn't care. If I knew what the operation was, I'd know why it's so important to him.

Summation: He wants her to have the operation more than she wants to have it.

II. I think she's got to be pregnant. Although, if she is expecting, the operation isn't optional.

The way they talk about things getting back to normal afterward - that could be pregnancy. But she must be so ignorant! Why are they going to Madrid? What about things getting back to normal? What wasn't normal? The fact that she was fat (pregnant) perhaps explains why she thought he'd love her more after the surgery. She wouldn't be fat.

He drank a last drink without her. Perhaps he felt he needed it. Was she unreasonable? Or was she just so very naive?

If she was pregnant, why didn't he explain it to her? Was he pretty unsure of the whole situation too? Why was he letting her think she didn't have to have the surgery? Maybe it was easier to do it that way, when the time came it wouldn't matter what she wanted anyway.

Summation: He's pretending to be patient with her, but he's really not.

III. Is she very young? I think so, that would explain her seeming innocence. She wants everything to be "back to normal." What all has really changed? Has she just changed physically? How have his feelings toward her changed? He says he still loves her; she says she doesn't care about herself. Wait! I think I've got it, she's pregnant - but will have an abortion!! It's got to be. And I've written all this garbage already. "Letting the air in" - that could be an abortion. (the way he'd describe it to her)

He said, "I don't want anybody but you." He doesn't want a baby. How could I not have seen this - it's all so simple now. I don't know if she wants the baby or not. She doesn't really seem to know. I think if he wanted it she'd keep it. I think she realizes, too, that they're not going to be together forever. And the white elephant, the not wanted, it's the baby!

Summation: If he wanted the baby I think she'd keep it. But the way things stand, I think she'll have an abortion.

Student B
"Hills Like White Elephants" by Ernest Hemingway

The operation they are talking about is an abortion. I don't think that the girl really wants the abortion but she will go along with it because the man wants it. He says that if she doesn't want it neither does he, but I don't believe it. It's quite obvious that she doesn't want to go through with it.

He has the idea that they will be able to return to their relationship with no problems at all. She realizes that already her feelings have changed. She's very sarcastic when she speaks to him. He's trying to convince her that the pregnancy is the only thing that is making them unhappy and once this is taken care of they will be just like they were before.

One interesting thing I noticed in the story was the setting. They are at a railraod junction where they have a choice as to which way to go. It's symbolic of their choice whether to go through with the abortion or not.

The title, "Hills Like White Elephants" seems to refer to two different things. For the girl, I think the abortion is the white elephant. For the man, I think it is the unborn child that the woman is carrying.

Summation: The girl really doesn't want to go through with the abortion.

Second Loop

The girl is beginning to see how trivial their relationship is. This is shown when she sarcastically remarks on how the drink tastes like licorice. She also comments that the man just wants her to continue saying cute, clever little things so that he will still love her.

They have had a very trivial, fun, carefree relationship, until now. He wants to continue as it was but she realizes that they will never be the same again, at least she won't. He's very immature and foolish.

An abortion is a very serious matter. The people who decide to have one are making a decision that will affect them for the rest of their lives. I don't think that the man realizes this.

Summation: The couple has a very trivial relationship that probably isn't going to last much longer.

Student C
"Hills Like White Elephants" by Ernest Hemingway Feb 8, 89

I think this story was ridiculous. It reminded me of an incomplete sentence; it made no sense. All I got out of it was an American man and a girl talking and drinking somewhere in Spain, where it was hot. The conversation between the man and the girl meant nothing to me. They kept referring to "it"; that could have many different things. As great of a writer Ernest Hemingway was, this certainly was not one of his best writings. What was he trying to tell me? Was there a hidden message in these few pages of dialogue? I do have some questions. Was the girl from Spain? Where these two people lovers? Were they parting? Was "it" something illegal? With just a hint of something, this could have been an interesting, worthwhile story. Why did the man stop to have a drink of Anis in the bar alone, leaving the girl alone outside? Was that significant to the story? The description of the scenery was good; I almost felt warm reading it. But, the dialogue made no sense to me. Did I miss

something? This does not encourage me to read any more Ernest Hemingway stories.
Summation: This story made no sense at all. I have no idea what the purpose of the dialogue was. Was there a purpose?

Second Loop

I reread the story, looking for a clue to the puzzle. What was the American man and the girl discussing? They seemed to have some sort of a realationship going on between them. I found the word operation several times in their conversation. I think this is the key word. Although operation could have several meanings. I wonder if they are in the country illegally? Do they need to escape quickly? But they didn't seem that nervous about the operation. They were discussing it calmly and didn't seem to be in a hurry. He seemed to really care about her. Maybe she was sick and needed to have an operation. But what? If they were lovers, maybe it was an abortion. An abortion back in those days almost seems impossible. I suppose they did happen. How did they come to the decision of having an abortion? Did this girl really know what an abortion involved? Or was it the American man's decision, an easy way out? Was abortion illegal in those days? The idea of an abortion in those days seems unlikely.
Summation: They were making a decision about having an abortion.

Third Loop

Why were they even discussing an abortion? If he loved her, why didn't he just marry her and have the baby? How [could] he love her and not the child inside her? Maybe he didn't want the responsibility of a wife and a child. Maybe he was in the military, far away from home. Was he just filling an emptiness with her companionship? If he was drinking, he certainly was old enough to take on this responsibility. I got the impression the girl was not feeling well by the way she referred to the anis drink. Anis has such a strong, sweet, sickening taste to it. It must have really made her stomach feel ill. But it sounded like the plan was to go ahead with the abortion. The train would be coming very soon. They really didn't talk much about what their feelings were about the abortion. They always referred to how other people felt and said about the operation. Was he going with her to have the abortion? What then? Would they continue to be together, as lovers? I would think an abortion would have a big impact on their relationship in the future.
Summation: I think the girl had the abortion. But I wonder if it was carefully thought through.

After Discussion Response Samples

Student C
After Discussion Response ("Paul's Case")

Paul was not really that abnormal. He was a troubled teenager, not knowing what he wanted or what to do about it. I feel he was rebeling in his own way. He didn't have a mother and it seemed his father had no extra time for him. In today's society, Paul would have or could have gotten help. Paul did not feel accepted and he had low self-esteem. He had no where to turn, so I believe he just lived in his fantasy world, where he was safe. That is where he was comfortable. He felt accepted at the theater; he was someone important. Nobody questioned him. He had grandious ideas of himself while at the theater. I think his suicide was well planned. He spent a week in New York on stolen money, enjoying himself. He know it had to end, that he would get caught. So, the only way out was suicide. It seemed easy enough. This way he wouldn't be punished for stealing the money. He had it all planned out carefully. He found a way to finally be at rest.

After Discussion Response ("Hills Like White Elephants")

The fact that the American man wanted his girlfriend to have an abortion seemed to be the issue in the story. He was encouraging her to go ahead with the operation. But the girl had reservations about the oeration. I think she knew their relationship was coming to an end, regardless of the decision about the abortion. He was trying to be sincere so she would have the abortion. He really didn't care how she felt. He did not want the responsibility of a child. Then his lifestyle would certainly change. He kept telling the girl he wanted only her--nobody else. He did his best at talking her into going ahead with the abortion. I think she did have the abortion, even though she wasn't sure of her feelings. But I think she also ended her relationship with the American man at this point. I think she discovered there was more to life then just this superficial life she was living, wandereing from town to town. It had been fun, but things were different now.